

DNREC awarded \$345,000 grant from EPA to protect Delaware wetlands through conservation and education

DOVER – DNREC has been awarded a \$345,000 US Environmental Protection Agency Wetland Program Development Grant that will go to the Division of Watershed Stewardship Watershed Assessment and Management Section's Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Program to fund enhanced wetland conservation in Delaware through science, statewide mapping, and education and outreach.

EPA announced the grant today in Philadelphia in a statement from Region III Administrator Shawn M. Garvin: "Wetlands play a significant role in protecting our nation's water supply. By taking action to protect and restore these valuable resources, DNREC is protecting sources of our drinking water, preventing flooding, and making us more resilient to climate change."

DNREC Secretary David Small said the grant would benefit Delaware in confronting challenges to conserve, sustain, and restore the state's wetlands, which cover as much as one-fourth of its topography even after 200 years of wetlands losses that have continued into the 21st century. "Delaware's wetlands are among our most important ecological resources but continue to face threats – pollution, sea level rise and changing climates and landscapes," Sec. Small said. "We value our partnership with EPA that will support our efforts to protect and restore wetlands and ensure their valuable services."

The grant will focus on intensifying conservation and outreach efforts made to wetland landowners, especially in the case of

Delaware's ecologically unique wetlands – and the importance of conserving these vital resources through voluntary landowner incentives along with new and imaginative outreach efforts aimed at public awareness of how precious and essential wetland resources are to a safe, healthy and robust environment and economy, and especially so for Delaware's water supply.

Grant funds are to be used for a new statewide wetland mapping effort and for an updated wetland status and changes report covering the past 10 years, which will improve DNREC's ability to provide more accurate data for environmental decision-making. (The most recent mapping effort – completed in 2007 – documented 320,000 acres of wetlands in Delaware.)

Grant funding also will augment DNREC's efforts to monitor and assess wetland conditions in the northern Chesapeake Bay Watershed while reporting on wetland conditions in the Appoquinimink River watershed in New Castle County, along with continuous monitoring of ecological success from past wetland restoration projects.

Funding from the EPA grant will also augment costs of the Division of Watershed Stewardship's hosting the 2018 Delaware Wetland Conference, which brings together scientists, landowners, businesses and academia in the Mid-Atlantic Region for a gathering under DNREC's aegis that has grown significantly since it was first held in 2001. More outreach will come from a Wetland Celebration event in Delaware to be held during American Wetlands Month each May.

EPA awards the Wetlands Program Development Grants in conjunction with the federal Clean Water Act, which itself recognizes the dangers of upstream pollution sources. EPA notes that as water flows downstream, it can carry pollutants with it, and that wetlands are instrumental in eliminating or treating pollution, and can have a huge impact on receiving waters located downstream. For more information:

http://water.epa.gov/grants_funding/wetlands/grantguidelines/index.cfm

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